The Cloister

A Play

By Emile Verhaeren

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THE CLOISTER

EMILE VERHAEREN

THE CLOISTER

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

TRANSLATED BY OSMAN EDWARDS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
MCMXV

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PREFACE

POETRY and drama, once intimately allied, have been so little associated of late years that a dramatist who casts his story in poetic form must usually look for appreciation to a staunch minority. To such a minority Emile Verhaeren, in his dramas at least, has hitherto addressed himself, shaping his vision in accordance with independent standards, and confidently awaiting the verdict of more fastidious taste than is fostered in the "commercial theatre." Naturally, therefore, the success of *Le Cloître* has been a striking but gradual *succès d'estime*, enhanced by fine acting and enthusiastic criticism in those cities—Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Manchester, and latterly, London—where special audiences are willing to welcome plays of special calibre. It is hoped that the present version, made in close collaboration with the author some fourteen years ago, and following with fidelity his alternations of elaborate lyric and staccato prose, will convey a fair suggestion of those unconveyable qualities which make the original unique.

Le Cloître was written in 1899 and published in 1900. M. Reding produced it in the latter year at the Théâtre Royal du Parc of Brussels, where it ran for a fortnight and has been often revived. At

Paris M. Lugné-Poe offered it the hospitality of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. Ten years later Berlin and Manchester followed suit. It may be surmised that in neither city was a Protestant audience likely to grasp the full significance of such a play. Journals commended it to attention as being "a Play without a Woman." To ask the playgoer to forgo sexual interest betrayed an abnormal playwright. It is well to remember, therefore, that for the author and for Belgium at the end of last century Catholicism in education, politics, art, and every other form of activity was a fact of dominant importance. Brought up in an orthodox atmosphere, the young poet derived his clearest impressions of the cloister from a retreat of three weeks spent in a monastery near Chimay. The result was a slim volume of poems—*les Moines*—which are sometimes said to contain the germs of the play written thirteen years afterwards. But they are little more than water-colour sketches of monastic experience in comparison with the solidly drawn figures and careful composition of the ultimate picture. The play has a charm, which is more than pictorial, as the poems are—more even than dramatic. Not only does it unfold a tragic story of human misery intensified by a religious setting, but interwoven with the conflict between a man and destiny is a more shadowy but equally real conflict between ideas. Behind each monk, behind Balthazar, Thomas, Mark, the Prior, stands an idea, one of the weapons with which the Church has conquered the world. Behind the whole group of

monks is an ecclesiastical ideal, that of separate and exclusive jurisdiction, one that seemed no less injurious to the community in the author's eyes than the military claim to a similar privilege, which, at the time of the composition of the play, was causing the case of Dreyfus to ring through Europe. The presence of these large but implicit rather than explicit factors in the problem of Balthazar's ruin must be borne in mind, if we would realize the scope of the poet's aim. Superficially we are concerned with the struggle for succession to the Priorate between two rivals, of whom the loser is disqualified by suicidal remorse. Actually, however, Balthazar is not merely the victim of a frantic conscience. He is also the spokesman of emotional, intuitive faith, which contrasts with the keen and subtle scholasticism of his opponent. How contemptuously does the Prior's ancestral pride dismiss the childlike simplicity of Mark! The sympathetic insight with which such various types are drawn and the skill with which their interaction is utilized to entangle the soul of the parricide, have the effect of deepening our interest in the issue. We seem to witness not merely the ordeal of a monk, but also the trial of a monastery, before the tribunal of modern thought. Not as an advocate, but as an artist Verhaeren presents the case, draping each participant in turn with folds of splendid rhetoric.

Such reflections are more likely to occur to a reader than to a spectator, for in the theatre one is, or should be, enthralled by the art of the actor. Of

the five Balthazars whom I have seen the most fiery, the most tragic was certainly M. de Max. The performance given by M. Liten's company at the Kingsway Theatre in January 1915, would have been more convincing if the part of Dom Mark had not been left in feminine hands. Apart from this the *ensemble* was excellent. Gratitude no less than honesty impels me to record that no foreign impersonator of the gentle boy-monk was able to express the beauty and tenderness of the part so perfectly as Mr. Esmé Percy, who induced Miss Horniman to mount *The Cloister* for a week at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on 3 October 1910. There was no wave of pro-Belgian sympathy at that time to float the play into fame, but the critics declared its production to be "a triumph of courage and initiative." Its reception by both press and public on its own merits, aided, of course, by a competent and well-trained company, encourages me to believe that the "translator" is not wholly "traitor." Mr. Percy has undertaken to introduce the play during the coming season to the people of Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. His long and intimate acquaintance with this drama, which dates from its first performance in Brussels, should ensure for it a faithful and fervent lease of life among lovers of great poetry, even though it be seen through the glass, darkly, of Anglo-Saxon translator and interpreters.

OSMAN EDWARDS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

Dom Balthazar.
Dom Mark.
The Prior.
Father Thomas.
Dom Militien.
Idesbald.
Theodule.
Monks.

THE CLOISTER

ACT I

A convent garden with symmetrical flower-beds, box-hedges, arbours, and sun-dial; to the right towards the front, a Calvary; to the left, Roman archway, leading to the chapel; at the back, MONKS *are playing bowls, working at fishing-nets, and mending garden-tools. Some, seated in a circle on a broad wooden bench, are engaged in discussion.*

THOMAS. [C.]
I WAS saying then: God cannot be evil. Now, if we only fear that which is evil, why is it taught that "The *fear* of God is the beginning of wisdom?"

BALTHAZAR. [*Walks up and down impatiently.*]
You are too fond of argument.

THOMAS.
The matter is important. If you decide this question wrongly, you put the whole life of a Christian on a false basis.

BALTHAZAR.
You are too fond of argument, I tell you.

MARK. [*Extreme* R.]
We should not fear God; we should love Him.

THOMAS.
You talk like the arch-heretic, Basilides.

MARK. [*Advancing.*]
I? Like Basilides?

THOMAS.
Basilides says in so many words what you affirm.

MARK.
Saint Augustine says it, too.

MILITIEN.
Dom Mark is right. Saint Augustine does say in so many words, "*Love and do what thou wilt.*"

THOMAS.
Oh! that is not at all the same thing. Saint Augustine reserves fear. The worshipper should vary his adoration; he should be at once both fearful and trembling and full of fervour. . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Impatient.*]
You are too fond of argument, too fond of argument. . . .

THOMAS. [*To* BALTHAZAR.]
My brother, you do not distinguish the infinite diversity of the Divine Nature and Personality.

BALTHAZAR. [*Abruptly. Advances to* C.]
A passion, a rage for God is what I feel;
I hear but one appeal,—
Theirs, who proclaim
With all but frantic eulogy His Name;
As if they found no language but a cry,

One cry, their mad life long,
But clear as lustral water, pure and strong. [*A pause.*
God does not ask to be described, to be
Weighed and dealt out in volumes grandiose
Pompous with solemn pride.

THOMAS.
Thy faith grows simply, as grass grows,
Contented on God's threshold to abide;
But God to-day, when Thought stirs every mind,
Must be discussed, that He may win mankind.

BALTHAZAR. [*Violently.*]
He is most God, when comprehended least.
When faith and love for weariness have ceased
To hold Christ up—bare—bleeding—before men,
Then man seeks to explain Him, it is then
Man wastes his hour in vain, deep argument.
How God must laugh to see such reason spent
On spiteful and vainglorious exercise!
He loathes this vulgar trade of "Hows" and "Whys"
Wherein His Name stands quoted, high or low,
As the defender's skill plead well or no.
God is more high than human sages dream;
He is too vast, too deep, too infinite
For man to sound His depth, or scale His height;
And only in some ecstasy apart
Of loving sacrifice and joy supreme
A Saint has, once or twice, attained His heart!

MILITIEN.
That is the truth!

MARK. [*Full of enthusiasm, advancing towards* BALTHAZAR *and remaining near him.*]
Oh! my brother! my brother!

THOMAS. [*Feigning surprise.*]
We deserve, no doubt, to be flouted and denied.
[*Addressing the other* MONKS, *who interrupt their games to listen without taking part.*
And that is where we stand, we—the successors of Bonaventura, of Saint Thomas Aquinas!
[*Addressing* DOM MARK *and* DOM MILITIEN.
Yet these were Saints! no less than those you claim.
Saints! on whose brows the apostolic flame
Shone like a sword of God with ray serene;
Their hearts in darkling thought had caught the keen,
Essential spark, from which the soul takes fire;
Their faith took reason for a cloth of gold,
And broidered there great lilies fair,
Doctrines sublime and bold,—
Leaving to feebler hearts the dull desire
Of customary prayer.
[*Taking* BALTHAZAR *directly to task.*
Ay: those were saints indeed! and sages, too,
And heroes, whereas you . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Troubled.*]
Look not on me,
When you are speaking of such men sublime.

MILITIEN.
Greatness has fallen from the heights; our time
Is atheist. It denies the fervent praise,
Which hailed in western lands in ancient days
The hero's purity, the Christian's strength;
When faith fell, shadowing our shores, at length
Came Science and sang her own Magnificat;
Now Science in her turn is pointed at,
A murderess, a destroyer; those deny,

Who dreamed her mistress of bright harmony,
So fair, that she alone explained the world!
Her truth becomes untruth; to-day is hurled
On yesterday; no system is so wide,
But premiss by result is falsified;
Prodigal guesswork spreads and spreads no light;
There is no more false or true, no wrong or right;
Science is dying . . . by herself devoured.

THOMAS. [*Advancing towards* MILITIEN.]
'Tis false! With all the future is she dowered!

MILITIEN.
We must return to the old, simple creed
Of children; love and gentleness we need
And ignorance. I know no man alive,
Whose life will suit the time, when these revive,
Save one, save only Mark here.

BALTHAZAR. Him I call
Our Highest!

MARK. [*In confusion.*]
I? Not I? Among you all
I am the least, the lowliest.

BALTHAZAR. Thou art the same
As Francis of Assisi, child, whose name
Perfumes and crowns with lilies all the Church.
Oh! beside thee, I feel what black sins smirch,
What heavy sins oppress me. But thou art
Fair innocence, our temple's holiest heart,
Our paragon, a vessel of pure flame.
And were we as those men of fiery fame

Whose ardour turned the Middle Age to gold,
We monks should kiss thy rough robe's hem, should
hold
Sacred thy tranquil and miraculous hands . . .

MARK. [*Greatly moved.*]
Oh! Balthazar! my brother Balthazar!

BALTHAZAR. [*Violently.*]
I am nothing but a wind, blown fierce and far,
A torch, tossed madly in the tempest's night,
When I behold that fixed and tranquil light,
Which through thy soul unconscious shows so plain!
My pride seems then a thing abject and vain,
When thou art near; I long to mortify
My heart, my flesh, my being; let them lie
Here in the dust below thy shining feet . . .
[*He falls on his knees, as if insane.*

MARK. [*Tries to lift him.*]
My brother, my poor brother Balthazar! . . .

BALTHAZAR.
Let be; let the mud mar
My fallen falsity of painted pride;
Sin, upon shame and fear, has crucified
My soul, which, wert thou pitiless, would die.

MARK.
O kneel not, Balthazar, I charge thee by
The love that keeps us one: look at me now!
Am I not still thy ward, my guardian thou?

BALTHAZAR. [*Rising.*]
I wished to show myself, compared with thee,
Humble and worthless.

MILITIEN. Brother, thou hast set
Such high example of frank worthiness,
As fires our fervour.

BALTHAZAR. [*To* MILITIEN.]
Pity my distress.

MILITIEN.
Our prayers will not forget . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*To all, going with trembling steps to* R. *behind columns.*]
I bid you all immensely pity me . . .
[*He moves away, leaving the* MONKS *astonished. Soon* DOM MILITIEN *and* DOM MARK *rejoin him in the arbour. They disappear.*

THOMAS. [*To the* MONKS *who continue absorbed, each in his work.*]
Strange—is it not? Suddenly, like a gust of wind, to fall into such excess of passion! You talk and reason and prove,—when all at once this astonishing Balthazar breaks all bounds and provokes a sort of edifying scandal.

IDESBALD.
He is masterful and arrogant; impetuous and wild. You would fancy him above us all, and look at him now—more humble, more submissive than the lowest of lay-brothers. No one sees his true character.

THOMAS. [*Rises scornfully.*]
You think so?

IDESBALD.
The security of these cloisters will be gone, if ever this monk becomes our chief.

THOMAS.
Who would prevent him?

IDESBALD. [*Earnestly.*]
I appeal to every monk here.

THOMAS. [*Mockingly.*]
Oh! They have neither his strength nor his stature. In his presence they are mute like conquered men.

A MONK.
Because the time to act is not yet come.

THOMAS.
Why, it was always time to act, since first he came! Our Prior supports Balthazar, because he is Duke and Count like himself, like Dom Mark and Dom Militien. His wrinkled hands are always pushing him in front of us. For ten years I have seen it, struggled against it, worked against it. To-day, when I should welcome the help of you all, not one will move.

A MONK.
We will never accept Balthazar.

THOMAS.
Then defend yourselves. Something tells me, we must rely on action. . . .

IDESBALD.
Rome will never impose him upon us.

THOMAS.
Dom Balthazar comes of a noble line;
His virtues through his titles doubly shine;
He is rich in sureties and ancestral fame;
For long since came
His ancestor,
Bristling with gold and pillage,
Back to his village,
And dowered with all his store
These cloisters; where we magnify Christ's name.

A MONK.
'Tis an old fable.

THOMAS.
If men think it true, that is enough.

IDESBALD. [*Dreamily.*]
We others are mere clerks and commoners!
Balthazar is Comte d'Argonne, Duc de Rispaire. . . .

THOMAS.
Who least among us all
Is armed with power to foresee,
With living, battling Science? Surely he!
Beyond our narrow monastery-wall
He never notes the lightning, when it sears
With distant flash the enormous, thundering sky;
Of that loud-leaping fight he nothing hears,
Which even God mistrusts uneasily.
His world is bounded by a convent-wall,
To-day, when all creation rings so loud
With deep revolt, by day and night avowed,
That not to hear is not to exist at all,
Or else to be of stone! He only strives
To keep intact the old ascetic dream,

Dreamed by his forefathers, to reign supreme
Above us all: thus would he cramp our lives.
He comes to us three centuries in arrear!
His soul is harsh, fanatical, austere;
His knowledge is of texts alone; yet he,
Because he acts the Prior, our Prior will be.

A Monk.
'Tis you, who should be Prior.

Thomas.
That depends on yourselves. You are the new force, unknown till now, which must assert itself. Warn the Pope. Appeal to Rome.

Idesbald. [*Hesitating.*]
They should nominate you.

Thomas. [*Looking hard at* Idesbald.]
And you? What of you?

Idesbald. [*Feigning indifference.*]
Oh! I? I?

Thomas. [*Firmly.*]
The sole decision rests with Rome. The Bishop favours me. He detests our Prior. He will act outside the monastery, cautiously, with proper regard for precedent. But you others, for God's sake, bestir yourselves.

A Monk.
You will tell us what to do.

Thomas.
Use your own wits. You must oppose Balthazar with your words, your attitude, and your aims,

whether expressed or not expressed. Oppose him in every step you take, in every letter you write. You must ruin him in the eyes of the Prior. You must shake him in his own eyes, that he may lose confidence in himself. How can I tell? You must tell yourselves what to do. . . .

IDESBALD.
Balthazar never seemed so dangerous as to-day.

THOMAS. [*To* IDESBALD.]
He is passing through a crisis of conscience.

THEODULE. [*To the* MONKS.]
Each of us will pray for him.

THOMAS. [*To* THEODULE.]
You will pray for him, when the monastery is safe.

THEODULE. [*Defiantly.*]
Dom Balthazar sets us an example.

THOMAS.
God rises again in spirit, every century, as once His Body rose again. Each spiritual Resurrection produces new witnesses to His glory. To-day we are those witnesses.

THEODULE.
And the Prior? And Dom Mark? And Dom Militien?

THOMAS.
You understand nothing of the common end, which we are all anxious to attain. You are like a withered branch on that tree of life, which God planted long ago, and still cherishes in this monastery.

THEODULE.
Our duty is to obey.

THOMAS.
We are the majority; we have knowledge and right on our side. You will see clearly one day.

IDESBALD.
Leave it to us.

A MONK.
You only substitute one ambition for another.

ANOTHER MONK. [*To* IDESBALD *and* THOMAS.]
Balthazar unites you against himself. If he fell, you would fight one another for his place.

THOMAS. [*To the* MONKS.]
We wish to set you free from the old bondage; we wish to awaken in you more life and power. Do not be your own enemies.

[*Silence falls, as the* PRIOR *is seen advancing.*

IDESBALD. [*In a whisper.*]
Leave it to us. . . . Leave it to us. . . .

[*The old* PRIOR, *leaning on his staff, slowly advances.* THOMAS *goes forward hastily to meet him. The other* MONKS *gradually withdraw and end by disappearing.*

THOMAS. [*To the* PRIOR.]
My father, I have finished my commentaries on Tertullian. May I send them to his lordship, the Bishop, and ask for his *approbatur*?

PRIOR. [*Crosses to* L. *and turns.*]
Monseigneur hopes great things from you.
He admires you, Father Thomas.

THOMAS.
Monseigneur is indulgent.

PRIOR.
You think that I am slower to admire?

THOMAS.
Your patronage is what I most desire.

PRIOR.
You bear a burning torch before God's face,
You pierce the gloom of infinite space
With tracks of fire;
Without such men as you to lead it right
The age would flounder in pitfall and quagmire.
We need pure brows, illumined with the light
Of Science, to subserve eternal Truth,
Just as we need strong hands
To issue firm commands,
Men of imposing race, who, from their youth,
Are wont to dominate large tracts of time.

THOMAS. [*After a pause.*]
With all respect, I hold not less sublime
The strength of those, whom Science has endowed
With ampler minds to dominate the crowd;
They, too, are able, they . . .

PRIOR.
All those, whose eyes see human nature plain,
Have thought as they still think to-day;
Their thoughts agree not with thy thoughts, but
mine.

I rule: I think: *You* think as I ordain. [*A pause.*
Hear me: so long as earth shall nourish still
Proud families of immemorial will,
Your hope will rest unrealized.
Their force and strength,
By God alone and not by destiny devised,
Have grown, at length,
So concentrated in such copious store
That they are charged with power for evermore:
To live for them is nothing but to reign.
Wherefore, unless this vast authority,
Grafted from sire to son,
Be flouted or undone
By those, who, holding, squander or abstain,
Never will one of you rule one of them.
By reason and by nature this is planned,
And you will have the wit to understand . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Coming up.*]
My father, I wish to speak with you—alone . . .

PRIOR. [*To* THOMAS.]
Leave us.

[THOMAS *moves away, then hesitates. The* PRIOR *looks at him. He disappears.*]

BALTHAZAR. [*To the* PRIOR. *Slowly: with emotion.*]
Yesterday, in the confessional, a man said to me: "It is five months since old Noll Harding was killed. They accused his son. He was arrested, tried, and condemned. But I declare him innocent. It was I who murdered him." At once, without more reflection, but obeying the deepest impulse of my soul, I bade the man go straight from my presence and acknowledge his crime . . . He went on to say: "I had every excuse. My own father's death was

caused by old Harding, who poisoned him." I almost drove the man away that he might give himself up as quickly as possible . . . And now, my father, do you understand?

PRIOR.
You have acted rightly.

BALTHAZAR.
And what of me—*me*? Ten years ago I killed my father, *I*, whom you have sheltered here in your midst, without saying a word . . .

PRIOR.
Was this man willing, like yourself, to be
One of our Order, willing on bent knee
To batter with a storm of ceaseless prayer
The doors of Paradise?

BALTHAZAR. What if he were?
Since yesterday I see by lightning-flashes
Into my soul . . .

PRIOR. Your crime is blotted out,
Absolved by me, absolved by Rome;
Ten years ago, when you made this your home,
It died in dust and ashes.
Comte d'Argonne, Duc de Rispaire,
At your last hour you will stand up to God,
Imdemnified by prayer.

BALTHAZAR.
I would cry out my crime to all the world . . .
By its swift eddies I am caught and hurled
Beyond the reaches of my stubborn will;
I would cry out my crime and earn grace still . . .

PRIOR.
My son . . .

BALTHAZAR. All night with weary hands I tried
To barricade and break its violent tide;
I could not. Like a savage sea
It leapt upon me furiously . . .
I had not eyes enough to watch the flood
Of ever-trickling life, and all the blood,
Which drained my father's breast
To deadly stillness. How the wound gaped wide,
Far wider even now than when he died!
It festered and the fissure grew apace;
With maddened eyes I marked the ceaseless flow
A trickling—trickling—ever-trickling stream.

PRIOR.
A dream!

BALTHAZAR.
Nay, it was blood: real blood reeks so:
I am defiled with it; I know;
I am red with blood, red to the very soul;
It pierces me, it burns me; through my whole
Flesh, like a flame, it runs from heart to head;
I breathe its taint upon me; everywhere
About me wind and air and light are red.
I fear each sudden gleam, each sudden stir;
All things are fearful. Let the least noise start;
My thoughts, my prayers are paralysed with fright;
And awful silence crushes all the night
Between its iron teeth my bleeding heart.

PRIOR. [*Solemnly.*]
My son, your brain is haunted and distraught.
No longer God, but Satan there

Ruins and rules your thought.
Dom Balthazar, for you he lays the snare
Laid long ago for fervent piety,
For monks, whom rocks and deserts saw surprised
By Pagan devils, yet unexorcised,
For Paul and Anthony.
Your spirit is afire, your soul aflare,
Your haggard feet eschew our paths sublime;
You do not see that theirs is the worst crime,
Who outrage God by doubt and by despair.

BALTHAZAR.
Father!

PRIOR. Be wise and confident again!
Let soberness and measured calm restrain
Rebellious fury! See that from to-day
Your will is as a scythe to shear away
This evil crop, which bristles with sharp shame.

BALTHAZAR.
Impossible!

PRIOR. I charge you in God's name.
[*In gentler tones, after a pause.*
My son, thou, in our midst, these ten years past,
Hast borne with ecstasy the bloodless fast,
The girdle of pain unseen, the burning smart,
Which, like a sore laid open, stings the heart
To death, to living death, our daily choice,
Our hope of earning Heaven! Christ doth rejoice
Because of thee; His bitter kisses heal
Those wounds sublime, where glorious drops congeal;
Lovely to Him is thy self-branding pain,
And angels sing thy penitential zeal.
Now, such a life from God thou durst not steal;

His priest, His harbinger, thou must remain;
Thou canst not by a mad red-raging feat
Cancel the debt of labour incomplete;
Nor thrust, as if thy justice were His law,
Between thyself and Christ a barrier.

BALTHAZAR. [*Agonized.*]
My father! Oh my father!

PRIOR. Hear my voice!
Leave not the way of pardon—thy first choice—
Which thine advancing feet so simply trod,
That now thy very crime finds favour with God;
He loves it, as the instrument whereby
Thy soul was chosen for especial grace.
If now thy words the heavenly plan confute
And break the ban of silence absolute,
They injure and blaspheme God to His face.
Christ lives indeed for justice, but he died
For pardon: death and pardon are the higher.

BALTHAZAR.
My father!

PRIOR. Think, too, if this parricide
Be flung as a bone to curs, how each denier
Will suddenly be armed to hurt us all;
And think, no human vengeance may appal
With crimson terror, since thou owest it nought;
And think of me, my son, for I had thought
To make thee chief and master of my power
After my death. Thine is a ruling race;
Thou art elect; thou owest to this place
Thy very life. God knows in what wild hour,
Or why, He brought thee to these walls at last,
Far from thy strange and stormy past,
Humble in spirit, but high and proud of heart.

BALTHAZAR.
I have sore need of pity, father!

PRIOR.
Not so: arise! Thy duty is rather
To soar on ample wing; as new crops start,
Spring from the fallow!—Here thou canst repent,
Winning anew the meed of holiness
To heart's content.

BALTHAZAR.
If only now, once and for all, I might
Here, in the chapter-house, my sin confess!

PRIOR.
Old usage gives thee such a right,
To take and make of it an arm secure.
Monks have this licence. But hast thou the might
To repossess thyself?

BALTHAZAR. Of that be sure!
Before my brethren I shall frankly tear
This red-clawed, evil monster from my brain,
And drown it in their golden-flowing prayer;
I shall go humbly, dazed with joy and pain;
My heart, whose only flowers were grief and fear,
Their honest counsel will wash clean and clear;
I shall entreat them, "Take into your hand
My weary hopes, wan terrors, rage, despair";
I shall hide nothing. Father, you will stand
Beside me?

PRIOR. [*Reassuringly.*]
Have no fear, I shall be there . . .

[BALTHAZAR *kisses the hand of the* PRIOR, *who goes out.* DOM BALTHAZAR *runs towards* DOM MARK, *who, for an instant, had been watching them from far off.*

BALTHAZAR.
O Mark, my brother, hearken!—Knowest thou
I shall be born again? night will turn day—
I shall become that man so far away,
Whom thou didst love long since . . .

MARK. Whom I love now.
For never didst thou forfeit . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Growing sombre again; sits down and turns his face away.*]
Hush! my shame
Is still to live and think myself the same.

MARK.
No matter what thy deed, such faith have I
In thy profound, long-noted piety . . .

BALTHAZAR.
Hush! Hush! Say nothing, until I, defiled,
Be pure!

MARK. My brother, my master, in whose eyes
I am no other than a simple child;
No part of me but flies
Towards thy misery, thy torments wild,
Born of some unknown care:
Here is my heart: lay down thy grief, thy torments there!
I am nothing, yet two hands have I
To fold in prayer, two knees to ply
In supplicating saints above;
And with the whole of my wrapt soul
I hail thee, who didst sow my heart with love.
For thee my fervent lips are never still;
I love thee all man may, within God's will;

I long to share thine ill, to bear
Thy cross, to feel thine anguish fierce
Fasten on me its violent fangs;
I long for thy transfixing pangs,
Which, like keen lances, thrust and pierce!

BALTHAZAR.
My child!

MARK. I feel some mystic atmosphere
Around thee; the most perfect of us fall,
Transgressing now and then our rules austere;
But were thy fault most palpable, not all
Hell's heaviest blows could interpose
To stay my love from growing greater still.
Regard me: look into mine eyes,
Full of thy fervour and thy will;
Thou art the magnet, bidding my heart rise
To happy, golden skies;
Thou art the joyful, unassuaged desire,
Which, though it tire, fills life with fire;
Thy witness, after Christ's,
Proves most of all to me that God exists.
Brother, for great deeds marked and manifest,
Rise up, let sorrow be:
Shine, as of old, victorious; in thee
Commandment shows most fair and mightiest.

BALTHAZAR.
Fond soul, spontaneous source
Of kindness, whom I needs must love and bless,
Despite the curbless anguish of remorse,
What naked trust I learned from thee,
What simple goodness, what sweet lunacy!
All nature's simplest tones by thee were taught;
Her accents, on thy fresh lips caught,

Mingled with mine, more harsh and passionate;
My haunted soul became less desolate,
Till I believe the message sweet,
Which instinct to thy heart sings secretly;
I think thou guessest God unerringly;
I know thee pure of all malicious heat;
I know thee strict in duty, prompt in prayer,
Chaste as an offering, virginal, and fair . . .

MARK. [*Excitedly.*]
Balthazar! . . . Balthazar!

BALTHAZAR. I shrank alway,
Because thy soul is of such delicate clay,
From fracturing its timid purity;
Else my red secret had been flung to thee;
Thou hadst been told what all will shortly know,—
My shame,—my dreadful sin,—which long ago
Found absolution, but I see it rise
From the black past again;
Again with rampant claws and bloody eyes
It comes to roam and roar through every vein!

MARK. [*Shrinking.*]
I am afraid; say nothing, I implore.
Humble not here thyself to me alone.

BALTHAZAR.
When compline ends, confession shall atone;
And thou wilt hear, wilt say what penance still
May free me from this riotous ill
And put it out of mind for evermore.

MARK.
My soul entire
Shall become fire

To watch thy pain above;
And like white linen all my love
Shall swathe thy heart and wipe away each tear;
I hold in hand two weapons shining-clear,
Wild prayer and fervent fast;
These shall contend, till peace be thine at last;
If yet the Holy Virgin, burning now
In fiery trance, be fain to grant my vow;
If she my deepest inmost thought would know,
"Incomparable Mother," I shall cry,
"More bright than rays and roses,
Heal thou my brother's grief and misery!
Be thou to him the raiment that encloses
Both joy and pardon fair,
That one on earth should wear
For God to glance with unshocked majesty
On human woe"!

BALTHAZAR.
My gentle brother!

MARK. Heaven without thee
Were stripped of gold, of glad eternity;
I wish to save my soul along with thine;
I wish to die, that ardour infinite
May bind us fast in happiness divine;
I wish our destinies might so unite,
That thy lips should with my lips make one sound,
That Jesus and His angels might confound
Thy praise with my praise, when our joint desire
Pours like a torrent in the heavenly fire. . . .
Brother, my brother!

[*He flings himself on* BALTHAZAR'S *breast.*
The bell rings.

BALTHAZAR. Be no more alarmed.—

Thou hast restored my strength.—Now am I armed
With thy clear spirit against all hell's power.
Already pardon and pity strike their hour,
Already peace rings softly in the bell. . . .
Already confidence complete
Comes to direct along God's path our feet. . . .
Be not alarmed, but pray again. Farewell!

[*They separate.* BALTHAZAR *goes to* L., *and* MARK *to* R.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The Chapter-house: wooden benches, black and white pavement with a rush mat in the middle. On the wall a crucifix. To the right, in his usual place, kneels Dom Balthazar *with hidden forehead and clasped hands.* Thomas, *entering, approaches slowly and taps him lightly on the shoulder.*

Thomas.
YOUR soul is uneasy, my brother. May I not pray and suffer with you?

Balthazar. [*Looks at him and replies with hesitation.*]
All prayers count before God.

Thomas.
Yours seems no ordinary suffering.

Balthazar.
All the prayers in the world, perhaps, weigh less than my crime.

Thomas.
Your crime?

Balthazar.
In a moment I shall confess it here before you all.

Thomas.
Is it so great as to dash your zeal to the ground?

BALTHAZAR.
My zeal? What has it to do with my zeal?

THOMAS.
I know the nature of your zeal—tenacious, violent!
I know.

BALTHAZAR.
Leave me . . .

THOMAS.
I know that its secret aim is to dominate these cloisters!

BALTHAZAR.
Leave me, I tell you . . . Neither you nor I will be ruler of this House. There are others . . . more worthy . . .

THOMAS.
Dom Militien?

BALTHAZAR.
Leave me . . . leave me . . . leave me!
[*Goes to* C. *before crucifix.*

THOMAS.
I no longer understand; I do not know what to think.
[*A pause.* BALTHAZAR *makes no reply.*
THOMAS *continues and goes nearer.*
Dom Balthazar, within our convent wall
You were the chosen man, who came one day
Empowered by God in some mysterious way
To seize by right on our obedience.
Your words were lofty battlements of strength,
Crested with proud pretence;

Your will, by adding stone to stone, at length
In spite of my will overawed us all!
Our Prior heard the call
Of a harsh nature, feudal as his own;
To you should pass at death his place and power.
Life with perplexing, vagrant paths is strown,
But you stood firmly up, a border-tower,
Whence one might see and show mankind
What roads propitious to its journey wind,
And where, through ways of Fate, is drawn God's
route.
I find you at this hour
Poor, weary, destitute,
A ruin, ruining itself.
Your haughty spirit shakes and falls apart;
Your boldness trembles; what if by-and-by
The vain, colossal pride, which sways your heart,
With sudden crash pay instant penalty?

BALTHAZAR.
If pride this price must pay,
At least 'twas I, who willed and chose the way.

THOMAS.
Ah! There the spirit spoke,
Constrained to utterance by the yoke
Of conscience. Always pride! You and your pride!

BALTHAZAR. [*Distracted.*]
What have I said? It is untrue, untrue!
To love—to love alone—I pay the due
Of agonies, which shall my soul reclaim;
You rob my words and thoughts of every clue;
Your speech, your glances dart
Insidious flame,
Which masters me with treacherous surprise;

But God, who loves and knows me through and through,
Into the deep recesses of my heart
Sees clearly with illuminative eyes.
O go your ways, O go your ways!

THOMAS.
You will not have my prayers, then?

BALTHAZAR. Saints on high,
Whose angel-wings are over Calvary,
Who watched the early Christians wage their wars,
Have pity! See how my repentance soars
Pure of deceit to pardon's mountain-crest.
My brother there in darkness stirs again
With tempter's tongue old pangs of obscure pain,
And sets the old pride bounding in my breast!
But let thy pity, Lord, on him, too, rest,
Pity on him, O Lord, pity on me;
I cannot, will not, even repel one word
Of proffered prayer;
Perhaps, more goodness and more grace are there
Than others pray with—but have pity, pity,
By thy death, by thy baptism, thine agony
Have pity on us, Lord!

THOMAS.
Those prayers for you are mightier that I make,
Because, in sueing God for your soul's sake,
I weep and on myself do violence;
More virtue lies
In prayer for those who are our enemies,
Than in red-wallowing gulfs of penitence.
I pray and still shall pray for you.

BALTHAZAR. [*With resignation.*]
I thank you. [*A pause.*

THOMAS. [*Moves away and returns.*]
You said to me just now: neither you nor I will be
ruler of this House. And yet, Dom Militien—of high
lineage, I admit—is too old; moreover, he is ill,
shaken, on the verge of death—Idesbald? A mediocrity—Bavon and Theodule? Wretched scriveners,
absorbed in books they do not understand. As for
Dom Mark, a child, an innocent . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Abruptly.*]
Let be! Let him go free!
He does not know our life
Of violent ambition, infamous strife,
Nor your craft, brother, with his right at odds;
Faith in his own will follows faith in God's;
By angels, not by us, he is chosen chief,
Rising above our mire, a golden sheaf;
When he shall be our ruler designate,
Your lord and mine, to Heaven his heart will cry,
That Heaven itself may reinaugurate
Self-sacrifice, supreme humility.
Since such will be God's will, we shall obey;
Such *is* God's will—providing, if need were,
A miracle for every barrier,
Wherewith you cumber the appointed way.

THOMAS.
Astounding! Let the Prior say point blank:
"To rule and raise the Church, strong men of rank
Are chosen by God, because their force of soul
Condenses to more absolute control,
Being kept and garnered for the common weal,
Persistent, fervent, even when lost to view,
An heirloom, which the centuries seal . . ."
I understand, and think at once of you.
But Dom Mark . . .

BALTHAZAR.
Think of him now! Think of him!
[*Goes towards* L. *to door but turns and listens.*

THOMAS. [*Squaring his shoulders and looking* BALTHAZAR *full in the face.*]
I dream of no man's future but mine own.
Your strength in ruin by a fatal whim
Lies spent and prone.
But my strength mounts and utters a great cry;
I am sick of service and humility;
Within my spirit the New Age at length
Triumphs, endowing all her sons with strength
To spurn the time-worn, customary route,
As men reject a dead and sapless fruit.
You others see not how my heart burns clear
With apostolic zeal, God's pioneer!
Monks of proud line and crest armorial,
[*Pointing to crucifix.*
Christ would decide for me against you all.
Thus would He speak: "You rot in torpid ease
Behind a wall of sleepy pieties;
You vegetate! Far off the trumpets blow
War on my cross, whose wide arms long ago
Embraced the world and pressed it to my heart;
You play an ever-shrinking, sterile part;
Your mantles droop, unlifted by God's air;
You deck my altars, but the beadle there
Can light the candles and dispose the flowers;
You stifle boundless ardours, virgin powers,
The tongues of flame, which on my faithful few
At Pentecost descended. Worthless crew
How often, when I watch you groan and pray,
Drowsing the slow, monotonous hours away,
It seems I should chastise you." . . .

BALTHAZAR. [*Violently.*] Blasphemy!

Christ said Himself to His disciples, "I
Am in your midst, when ye are joined in prayer."

THOMAS.
His voice and gesture, mind and heart are there,
When those who preach are luminous and wise!

BALTHAZAR.
Monk, we are no less servants in His eyes!
The same fire burns us both with heavenly heat,
But our love seeks Him in some mute retreat
Of holiest peace. Your dream is to proclaim
Before the blind, deaf world His glorious name,
A world of dust and lust,
Which, like a miser, sick and very old,
Still plays with gold,
And on a painful death-bed will employ
Its utmost will, its utmost skill,
To fabricate some criminal, new toy.
What matters that, compared with truth divine?
With your God and with mine?
"Ah! the apostles and the saints!" you cry;
Supposing they returned! If suddenly
Out of the grave their stormy spirits came,
Should we not see them fill their hands with flame
To fire the world and reascend the sky?
I know as well as you what doom should be
Wrought on this impious and desolate age,
But never will I bandy words with it,
Infected by its pestilent heritage.
I doubt not that you painfully submit
To contact, which might stain the splendour of
Christ,
But, pride for pride, mine is less sacrificed.

THOMAS.
Yes, always pride!

BALTHAZAR. [*Imperiously.*] Say rather, dignity!
I do not blush to hold my honour high.
I grapple with my crime in vehement strife,
But my soul's stature is thereby no less.
Freed from one crime, myself I repossess,
To crush the evil spirit, that spurs your life;
I pave the way for Mark; I lift him high
On these strong Christian arms to victory.
My burning zeal there is no monk but knows,
And what rude vigour in my bosom glows,
To hinder and repel your mad design.
You make impure the sacramental wine
With dregs of knowledge and with lees of doubt;
So, drop by drop, you pour the poison out,
Which by-and-by will breed destruction.

THOMAS. [*Very coldly.*] Well,
By pride or penitence, I cannot tell,
Your soul will be its own destroyer, brother.

[*The* PRIOR *suddenly appears in the Chapter-house. The two* MONKS *are silent and embarrassed. After an instant* DOM BALTHAZAR *goes towards him.*

BALTHAZAR.
Forgive the violence, which broke with shame
My spirit's solitude. This mad monk came
To pester me with cares;
And tempt with wicked words my peace of heart.

PRIOR.
Your duty was to drive temptation away,
And muse in austere loneliness apart. [*To* THOMAS.
This man is praying—leave him to his prayers!

[*The* PRIOR *makes a gesture.* THOMAS *moves away.*

We two desire—we only—at this hour
To keep, my son, this cloister's pride and power
Above men's rancour and men's rivalry.
If thy confession be not firm and high,
If it should not restore thee to safe ground
Of general respect and peace profound,
Then it were well to wait and keep silence,
To bridle the stern lips of penitence.
I come to smooth the way, ere thou confess.

BALTHAZAR.
My father, God will easily impress
My strength on others, when amends are made.

PRIOR.
Truly, He is the Lord,—He owes thee aid!
Were I away, if He abandoned thee,
Thy supreme humbleness, and faith rough-shod
Would only injure us and injure God.
Why, if we cannot—two such men as we—
By Christian daring and heroic grace
Keep and defend as ours that holy place,
Which Heaven assigns us by alternate right,
There is an end of merit and of might,
An end of law and order, of the hand
Which rivets on the world its strict command.
Thy rash example is yet kingly-bold.
It must, like holy deeds, shine far and wide,
Till all the brethren, rallied to thy side,
Accept thee, future Master of their fold.
Moreover, I would have these schemers know—
Now—when their plottings to fruition grow—
All that divides them from such men as we,
Who cease not to command—on bended knee!

[*The bell rings. Footsteps are heard approaching. The* MONKS *enter the*

Chapter-house. Each takes his place. The PRIOR *ascends the pulpit.*

Crucifix.

PRIOR.

		Idesbald.	Militien.		
Monks.	Monks.	Theodule.	Mark.	Monks.	Monks.
		Thomas.	Balthazar.		

PRIOR.
This Monastery has abandoned an old custom, of which I am reminded by a monk, one of your brotherhood. Since public confession was abolished, the moral strength of our order has declined. Ten years ago, under Dom Gervais, my master and predecessor, the practice was still in force: I re-establish it to-day. You are about to hear the confession of a parricide . . .

THOMAS. [*Rises suddenly and remains standing.*]
A parricide?

PRIOR. [*Continues coldly.*]
Of a parricide, long since forgiven. Before the world such large and frank avowal would be impossible. But you are monks: you will understand its beauty and its heroism. You will extol what less lofty souls than yours could not understand. [*To* DOM BALTHAZAR.] My brother, make your confession.

BALTHAZAR. [*Rises, and then kneels on the straw mat in the middle of the chapter-house.*]
First I ask pardon of you all. My crime was committed long ago, and I have lived in these cloisters

day after day, year after year, exempt from punishment . . .
My father died: 'Twas I who murdered him.
Coming, one night, home from a dingy tavern,
I felt the wine's wild leaven turn
To madness in my head.
The household slept, but near my father's bed
A solitary light burned red in the dark.
The old man, though enfeebled, yet was stark
And rudely vigorous: I saw his throat
Naked with starting veins: there seemed to float
About his pallid brow a radiance dim;
Defenceless dignity defended him.
I paused . . .
Ah! had I for a moment there
Foreseen the life-long anguish of despair
In one flash; had the Christ, whose limbs avouch
[*Pointing to crucifix on wall.*
Our haggard kisses, kept my father's couch;
Had one of you—mine own familiar friend—
Been able in those days as now to blend
His heart with mine in prayer's enflaming flood,
Then sin had never stained my soul with blood,
Ne'er had I faced inevitable death . . .

PRIOR.
My son, confess your fault more quietly.

BALTHAZAR.
That instant, big with formidable fate,
My father's eyes were opened; suddenly
He sprang erect to meet my hate;
My throat was all on fire and my breath
Seemed dead. His clutch grew tighter on my arm,
But from his lips no sound betrayed alarm;
He wished that none should ever know

A name as high as ours had sunk so low.
I felt his brutal fingers grip my flesh
As in a vice; fury flamed up afresh;
Like a fierce animal,
I thrust my father back against the wall . . .
And now the knife glittered before his eyes . . .
So hard his strength was, and so huge his size,
He seemed like all my ancestors in one.
My fingers down his body groped their way
But lost their hold, and always he would shun
The blows I aimed, while his fierce hands at bay
Cut crimson nail-marks deep into my neck.
With all my strength I held him long in check,
Then dashed him to the ground, but he, once more,
Rising with supreme effort from the floor,
Stood, face to face and pride to obstinate pride:
I struck him and he died.
Such, in its bitter, utter loathsomeness,
Such was the foul, mad crime I now confess,
Even as it came to pass ten years ago.

PRIOR. [*Rising.*]
It reeks with blood and shame, yet, even so,
Our convent walls can stifle such a deed.
Here, tuft by tuft consumed, the evil weed
Burns up in golden, penitential fires.
We pass to judgment. Grieve, my son, no more,
But answer, as each questioner requires. [*A silence.*

A MONK. [*To* BALTHAZAR.]
Had your murderous hatred no cause?

BALTHAZAR.
My father was stern and I was wild. He stood like a barrier between my vices and the wealth they coveted.

ANOTHER MONK.
Did you take pleasure in desiring this murder?

BALTHAZAR.
Ay: long enough to tax my conscience with it.

PRIOR. [*Intervening.*]
The murder was hasty and violent. You cannot have taken pleasure in desiring, or time in preparing it. You magnify your fault.

BALTHAZAR.
My shame reaches farther than my sin.

A MONK.
If our reason condemns you, our hearts exalt you. Your example is magnificently Christian.

IDESBALD. [*Rising.*]
Magnificently Christian? An assassin, then, deserves an aureole?

MILITIEN. [*Rising too.*]
Dom Balthazar's avowal is sublime!
In olden days, when souls breathed loftier air,
Had such a monk confessed to such a crime,
Besieging God with such perpetual prayer,
Then all his brethren had rejoiced to see
With eyes made holier by his piety
His sin itself to highest Heaven aspire
On flaming wings of penitential fire.

IDESBALD. [*Still standing.*]
Before you saint the sinner, probe his guilt!

MILITIEN.
Ay! draw your sword and plunge it to the hilt!
"Love all men" is no maxim of *your* choice,

If one may judge by that relentless voice.
God from your heart is far away to-night;
Black hatred, like a hard and bitter blight,
So warps you that you hesitate to tell
Your brother he is pardoned. You repel
The guest, who knocks by night at your soul's door.

IDESBALD. [*Pointing to* BALTHAZAR.]
Must *I* be judged? Shall he be judged no more?

THEODULE.
From depth to depth, bewildered and distressed,
My judgment falters.

MILITIEN. [*Turning to* THEODULE.]
Crime becomes a test,
A crucial struggle, when transfigured by
Such radiance of God's lightning from the sky,
As struck and woke the apostle in Saint Paul.
Celestial miracles, you forget them all!
Invoking the poor wisdom of a day,
You cast the endless splendour and strength away,
Which filled mad, Christian cloisters anciently.
Christ's home on earth is an anomaly,
Unless we preach this doctrine to the throng:
'Tis heroes set the measure of right and wrong.
Dom Balthazar repents: then, from that time,
Stands higher in proportion to his crime;
The greater his recoil, the more he is strong;—
Not one of us had fought with death so long,
Nor passed victorious each perilous place.
His holy feat sheds light upon his face,
And Heaven shows all of us his sin for a sign,
A mark predestinate of grace divine.

IDESBALD.
Mad! You are mad! Was ever wickedness
So boldly praised? He is no more, no less
Than a mere criminal. His looks are wild
And bloody. We renounce him.

A MONK. [*Rises.*] We are defiled,
As by a leper's touch.

ANOTHER MONK. [*Rises*].
His prayer would mar
Our prayers at the same altar.

ANOTHER MONK. [*Rises.*] Balthazar
Has strained his eyes on death with look so grim
That they are tainted.

ANOTHER MONK. [*Rises.*]
Must we pity him,
When half the shame he cried
Was mixed with pride?

THEODULE. [*Dreamily.*] Nay: casting in His scale
A crime so monstrous, Christ Himself will quail.

PRIOR. [*Rising.*]
Silence! [*All sit down.*] You have ceased to examine a conscience: you wreak malice on the man. I hoped this confession would be worthy and profitable, but it ends in wrangling and hatred. Dom Balthazar's patience and resignation deserve something more than mere pardon. I invite you to examine, exclusively, his fault; that only, and nothing else.

THOMAS.
My brother, was your crime known?

PRIOR.
We only judge the sin. Crime pertains to human justice.

THOMAS. [*With great calmness.*]
My brother, was your sin known?

BALTHAZAR.
I escaped enquiry. A vagabond was punished in my place. I incurred the shame of seeing him die without saying a word.

PRIOR.
If the judges err, that is their business. Our justice is not their justice.

IDESBALD.
Still we must examine the fault in its full extent.

PRIOR.
Punishment is no part of the fault, but its sequel.

IDESBALD.
Then what penalty remains for him to suffer?

PRIOR.
It is I who decide that.

IDESBALD.
But, in that case, why have you summoned us here?

PRIOR.
To flash on you the light, which heroes cast.
To show you what a soul is like, where Christ,
Lived and enshrined and sacrificed,
Triumphs at last.

MARK. [*Ecstatically.*]
Pray without ceasing . . . pray . . . let us pray!

MILITIEN.
Yesterday and to-day Christ is the same.
His power can loose the soul from every snare
And draw it up to Him, like clustering flame.
Our brother was a martyr. . . .

IDESBALD. [*Rising.*] Nay; a murderer!
I say again, a common murderer!

A MONK. [*Ironically addressing the* PRIOR.]
There are some here, who vaguely would infer
That Balthazar deserves aggrandizement
For his crime's sake. They have the Prior's assent....

PRIOR. [*Suddenly rising.*]
Be silent all! I am sole master here.
Until my body, shrouded on its bier,
Shall lie at rest, where yonder Cross appears,
[*He points to the Cross on the wall.*
That guide and ensign of my choice,
You shall hold true each utterance of my voice.
I testify that by heroic tears
And fearless heart
Dom Balthazar has won henceforth his part
In Heaven above of everlasting bliss.
Alone, before you all, what shame was his,
What lowly excess of penitence, though Christ
Required no martyr to be sacrificed!
Yet no one rose and said, with joy at heart,
Knowing he would be understood of all:
"We are but sorry Christians, for our part;
Our souls, complacent and methodical,

What are they matched with this soul, mad for
Heaven?"
I testify as well that rancorous leaven
Chokes up your hearts; suspicious, ill at ease,
Basely you bore yourselves and guiltily;
I hear with ears I still have wit to use
Muttered rebellion, eager to reject
The total trust, the absolute respect,
And blind obedience, which are my dues.
[*Total silence.*
You think, then, by shrewd plots to sap at length
The stone-and-iron basis of my strength?
You think by subtle reasons to impair
The sense of what is written? . . . Speak!
[*He looks round him. Silence. No one moves.*
I swear,
Here to you all, my hands shall wield their power
Firmly above you, till that ultimate hour,
When my tired footsteps to extinction plod:
Power that shall stand intact, when I am dead.

THOMAS. [*Rising.*]
Know well, in this I hold you warranted.

PRIOR.
I care not. My sole warranty is God.
[*A long pause. The* PRIOR *grows gradually calmer and continues.*
And now, disperse! [*They rise.*] You have neither sufficient calmness nor clear-eyed charity to understand and judge your brother.
[*Turning towards* DOM BALTHAZAR.
Dom Balthazar, the custom of this monastery demands that I, who presided over this gathering, where so much magnanimity might have been shown, should now dictate your penance:

You will sleep on the bare ground, for a month;
You will repeat the Psalms at midnight;
You will keep away from the altar for three days, and will only hear Mass from the gallery behind the grating. Obey these commands and peace be with you!

[*Each* MONK *goes out after reverence to the Altar.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The Convent Garden. PRIOR *and* MILITIEN *seated outside door of chapel.*

PRIOR.

I HAVE been thinking of it all night.—Actually, in my presence, the assembly was bitterly divided. Dom Balthazar's confession was an utter failure, our monks . . .

MILITIEN.

Oh, you mastered them splendidly!

PRIOR.

I would sooner have died there and then, in my seat, than abandon Balthazar to them. One and all they flew at him, . . . at *me* . . . And Balthazar did not budge, he refused to defend himself . . . All his strength seemed dead, all his pride crushed.

MILITIEN.

Remorse will eat away the finest energy.

PRIOR.

How fiercely Idesbald opposed us! How soon his evil spirit made way among our monks! How openly they all displayed their audacity, their impatience. It seemed as if this monastery were slipping from my grasp, as if my authority were snapping, like a branch bent and whirled away by the blast.

MILITIEN.
You never spoke to them in such tones before.

PRIOR.
And did you notice *their* tone, when they opposed me, did you weigh their answers, their allusions, their defiance? Everything they said implied an understanding, a sudden consciousness of strength. What troubles me most is that they dared not only speak as they did, but think as they did, in our presence, in *my* presence. Some profound change must have taken place in this monastery without my knowing it—even now.

MILITIEN.
When a man becomes as old as we are, his eyes are too dim to see every change.

PRIOR. [*Catching hold of* MILITIEN's *arm and looking earnestly into his eyes.*]
To think that thirty years ago all was order and submission! When I was elected Prior, you were my only rival, and, when I was nominated, you were the first to obey my orders. Perhaps I should have lacked your wisdom had fortune gone against me. And what good counsel you always gave! . . . Tell me, do you really believe that Balthazar will be my successor?

MILITIEN.
Idesbald is plotting as keenly as Thomas for your place. The day which sees the ruin of Balthazar will separate them and pit one against the other. . . . Until now they have made common cause: it is a good sign.

PRIOR.
Alas! I cannot think you right,

Since I begin to doubt my sovereign might;
Authority has lost its brazen clang,
No longer ringing out, as once it rang.
While conscience in their hearts heard silently.
Mine arms grow weak; I am seventy to-night;
I tremble when I lift the monstrance high
Above the crowd. Death tolls within my breast.
I am a tottering wall, a ruined tower,
Whose turrets stand, defiant of death's power;
I shall have been in times of yielding clay
The last great Prior of ancestral sway.
God knows what swirling tide, when I am at rest,
Will sweep this monastery away! [*A silence.*
I see no other but thyself—no other—Dom Militien, able to succeed me.

MILITIEN.
I? . . . But if you are vanquished, am not I vanquished too? Am I not weary, ill, useless, on the brink of the grave? Who can say which of us two will bury the other? We have done our work in accordance with God's plan and soon we shall both depart in peace. [*A silence.*] Besides, when Balthazar has conquered his own qualms of conscience, he will triumph over the other.

PRIOR. [*Rises.*]
Oh, I will answer for that. My strength is equal to that final duty. But what if his own hands should wreak his ruin? What if he abrogate that magnificent store of energy which he has inherited? There comes a time when strength, even the surest, in spite of itself, accomplishes its own downfall. In such a case, nothing can be done. All is over.

MILITIEN.
You have still Dom Mark.

PRIOR.
He! Never! His hands are only able to pray . . .
[*The bell is heard.*

MILITIEN.
Sunday matins are ended.—Here come our monks.

PRIOR.
Go.—It is your turn to sing High Mass. I shall preach. [*They disappear.*

The MONKS *enter. Some walk about the arbours, others form into groups and converse.*

IDESBALD. [*To* THOMAS.]
Why did you support the Prior so positively? One should never admit that an opponent is in the right.

THOMAS.
You do not understand. [*Turns his back on him.*

IDESBALD.
You seem changed since yesterday. I do not recognize you.

THOMAS.
Once more: you do not understand.

IDESBALD.
What? What?—But tell me then . . .

THOMAS. [*Shrugging his shoulders and ignoring* IDESBALD.]
The Prior is right. Authority must remain intact, supreme. . . . Besides, things move so quickly, that my attitude is no longer worth discussing. It is generally approved. Even Theodule approves. He told me so.

IDESBALD.
Theodule?

THOMAS.
The Prior's cynicism opened his eyes.

IDESBALD.
Listen! Supposing I were to inform against Balthazar! A public prosecution would abase him more utterly than we can, and our monks would bear me no grudge for it . . .

THOMAS.
A monk can only be judged by monks. If Dom Balthazar came among us to hide his crimes, the monastery must give them burial.

IDESBALD.
It would be so easy . . .

THOMAS.
I forbid you to tempt me. . . . Dom Balthazar is destroying himself. Yesterday I was still thinking of a way to abase him, but to-day it is useless. Remorse is a passion for ruin and extinction. We need only leave him a clear course.

IDESBALD.
You are wrong. Let me do as I say.

THOMAS.
Let you . . . let you do as you say! [*Taking a sudden decision.*] You shall see. [*Calling the* MONKS *grouped on* L.] Brothers, my brothers, listen, all of you! Someone here advises me to inform the authorities outside the monastery that public punishment

may be inflicted for his fault on Balthazar. I wish you to bear witness that I reject the advice with horror.

IDESBALD.
Well, but . . .

THOMAS.
I say this before you all: before those who follow me, and those, if there be any left, who oppose me.

THEODULE.
Your honour was never in doubt.

THOMAS.
I love this monastery. It is my only home. Its spirit may be old fashioned, but its privileges are sacred. I shall cherish them as they have never been cherished before. We are monks, before and above all.

IDESBALD.
This monastery cannot evade the law.

THOMAS.
You are alone in thinking so. You raise between yourself and us a barrier more impassable than that which Dom Balthazar erected. If ever I listened to your counsels, at this moment I reject them and separate myself from you.

A MONK.
At last!

ANOTHER.
It was inevitable.

THEODULE.
Idesbald was dangerous: he came between us and you.

THOMAS. [*To* IDESBALD.]
Your plotting was petty, your ambition devoid of greatness. Your spirit wavered uncertainly over books from which I drew strength to strike and wisdom to soar. Our brethren might well fear your influence. When they saw us together, they might think us scheming to betray them.

THEODULE. [*To* THOMAS.]
Henceforth there is nothing to separate us.

IDESBALD. [*Pointing at* THOMAS *and addressing the* MONKS.]
Surely, I must be dreaming. . . . He says this to me, whom he was continually urging . . .

THOMAS. [*To* IDESBALD.]
Let us forget one another. Henceforth, let us pursue different roads.

IDESBALD.
What you say is absurd. It cannot be that in a single day, a single moment . . .

THOMAS.
What must be, will be.

IDESBALD.
Oh! I loathe you even more than Balthazar!

THOMAS.
And I excuse, I pardon you.

IDESBALD.
I scorn your pardon. I defy you, face to face, in this monastery; I will overthrow, one day, the work of your crafty hands, which now rises to triumph: I will upset in my turn one day . . .

A MONK. [*Approaching* IDESBALD *and pointing to* THOMAS.]
All of us here approve our brother Thomas.

IDESBALD.
But you do not know how implacable, how cunning he is, how his soul . . .

THOMAS. [*To the* MONKS.]
Let him talk: I no longer listen . . .

[*The* MONKS *withdraw, following* THOMAS *and leaving* IDESBALD, *who sinks down on a bench, beaten.* DOM BALTHAZAR *appearing at the other side of the garden, advances and kneels at the foot of the crucifix. Scarcely is he at his prayers when* IDESBALD *approaches him.*

IDESBALD.
Dom Balthazar!

BALTHAZAR.
What? You?

IDESBALD.
My brother, Balthazar.

BALTHAZAR.
Begone, begone!

IDESBALD.
I come to tell you . . .

BALTHAZAR.
I wish to hear nothing . . . I do not wish you to come near . . .

IDESBALD.
It concerns you; your position in this monastery.

BALTHAZAR.
No: Say nothing, nothing! go away! go away! . . .
[BALTHAZAR *rises, and drives off* IDESBALD, *who at last withdraws.*
DOM BALTHAZAR *kneels down once more. Scarcely is he at prayer, when* DOM MARK *appears and goes up to him.*

MARK. [*Deeply moved, almost weeping.*]
My brother, it is thy duty to deliver thyself to the Judge!
[DOM BALTHAZAR *is astounded. Silence. Suddenly a light seems to dawn on him.*

MARK. [*Continues.*]
I almost fear to tell thee so,
For my soul, torn with woe,
Aches with each nail thy martyred senses know,
But God claims higher service than love may!

BALTHAZAR. [*Anxiously.*]
Say on! Say on! . . .
[*His eyes wet with tears, as he gazes on* DOM MARK.

MARK. Would I had known thee on that day,
When public rage and hate
Beheld another lose his life for thee!
O! that I had been he,
That starveling vagabond, whom infamy

Banned, but the Cross took safely in,
And a priest shrived his sin;
So had I given life and shed my blood for thee!
I should have died a martyr, silently
Sinking my gentle force in that dim tide,
Which swept thee from man's violence aside;
My peaceful soul on wings of fervent flame
So surely had been borne along
Up to God's angel-throng,
That, praising, I had ever named thy name,
And summoned thee—repentant—reconciled—
To share with me God's golden festival.

BALTHAZAR.
O noblest of our Order, gentle child!
Thy trembling heart, the purest of us all,
Lightens our darkness!

MARK. Ah! but think of him,
That innocent man, whom Justice, blindly grim,
Despoiled of life and honour! When his heart
In agonizing madness burst apart,
Think how he yearned to reach, to curse
That other,
Whose arm had truly stricken down a brother,
Before God's face, out of the universe;
Think, brother, how his cry must echo shrill,
Demanding thy damnation.

BALTHAZAR. Oh! be still!
Be still! . . . I have guessed it. . . . I have killed
two men:
For first I took my father's life and then
I slew that other. . . . In black gulfs of pain
I suffer shipwreck! Verily, my brain
Is dark as a nocturnal vault,

Not seeing that Man's justice is concerned
No less than God in punishing my fault.
Oh! I was mad! And always, when I turned
In duty to our Prior for advice,
He fed my folly with glib sophistries,
Lest, otherwise, his Power should come to nought.
Now one thing matters: following one sharp thought
To probe repentance to its uttermost end.
How can I thank thee enough, my child, my friend?
Thy warning led me from false roads aside
And gave my horror-haunted feet for guide
Thy passionate faith, thy white simplicities.

MARK.
With sobs and sighs and litanies
I sued Our Lady, Mother of my Soul,
That, pure and whole,
I might neglect no part of duty's debt!
I love thee! all the more that I must yet
Wound thee and weep to do what yet must be;
I tremble, seeing the massed Calvary
On every cross a monstrous arm extend,
As though it beckoned thee to fearful end!

BALTHAZAR.
Rather rejoice: thou giv'st my soul new life.
My fury, unappeased by futile strife,
Wandered, not knowing on what prey to impress
The cruel teeth of agonized distress.
Now ample fields of penitence display
New vistas to my vision; far away
Salvation now gleams gradually bright.
At last, my feet turn back towards the light!
I am regenerate, since thy radiance came,
Fair as a flower, that trembles into flame,
And shiningly dispersed my dark unrest.

I feel my heart turn golden in my breast.
My conscience is transfigured, so that I
Fear nothing: the sharp blow, the taunting cry,
The bloody axe, are sweet: Death's terror fails,
I will remember how Christ kissed the nails
Upon His gibbet; I will think the word,
Absolving my mad grief, by thee is heard,
And, when my strangled body at last shall fall
Prone on the scaffold, God will hear thy call.

MARK.
Alas, my brother!

BALTHAZAR. Though I suffer, still
Death will be red and Christian! If God will,
No shock shall lay that rocky courage low,
Whereon His name is carven; I will show
With what calm brow, what vast tranquillity
Even to-day a priest still dares to die!
At last I feel, while all those tempests cease,
The dawning grandeur of a soul at peace.
Why does death wait? Already I can hear
Confessors whisper pardon in mine ear;
I hear already martyred saints, who wait
High up to comfort me, at Heaven's gate.
"Open!" I cried to them: "Lo, I am he,
Who from the land of darkness comes back home,
That land, where crimes, like flaming lions, roam;
Lo, I am he, who now comes back
From the remotest track
Of his soul's panic misery,
Saved by a child, whose gentle art
Through love and prayer so brightly fired his heart,
That by the old baptismal way
Towards the angelic hosts he mounts to-day,
Where heroes, saints and martyrs dwell apart!

I am he, who vanquished and put hatred by,
Yet, being enchained by human sophistry
And holding right to be *his* right, demurred
To pay the total price, by crime incurred.
O wondrous Heaven, infinitely deep,
Where crimes are burned asleep,
Into your flames, by pity and pardon fanned,
I fling myself to the furnace as a brand;
I reach your golden threshold, knowing not
If vanquished or victorious my lot,
Unheralded and unescorted quite,
Save that my grief and this child's grief unite. . . .
[*He points to* DOM MARK.
Enough! the air of this earth stifles me;
The wind is drunk with blood and blasphemy;
I long for instant death, for instant life.

MARK.
And I, my brother?

BALTHAZAR. O gentlest of friends!

MARK.
First must thou suffer penance, make amends. . . .

BALTHAZAR.
No! No! Christ must not wait: his flames are lit.
I will not for a dismal rule remit
That hour, which shall behold me saved and free.
Brother, farewell, farewell! Only in thee
I have found a soul, where highest truth has part.
Soon all my fault in all my blood will drown.
From Heaven, with outstretched soul, I shall look down.
Farewell! [*He hastens away.*

MARK. [*Falling on his knees and hiding his face in his hands.*]
I entrust thee, brother, to God's heart!

[*The bells ring. The* MONKS *enter the church.* DOM BALTHAZAR *returns, hesitates, and suddenly takes a decision. The worshippers enter by the garden-gate to hear Sunday Mass. He mixes with the stream, as they pour into the porch.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The Chapel. On the right the altar. Facing the audience, the barred recess in which Dom Balthazar *does penance. Under this recess a door. To the left the pulpit. Near the door, on the wall, an enormous Crucifix.*

Dom Militien *at the altar is finishing Mass. As he intones* "Ite Missa est" *and turns away towards the sacristy, the* Monks *reply:* "Alleluia."

The Prior *slowly ascends the pulpit.*

The Monks *are massed near the altar-rail in three rows. The* Worshippers *are grouped behind them, reaching across the stage to the pulpit.*

Prior. [*Making the sign of the Cross.*]
IN the name of the Father . . . and of the Son . . .

[*As the worshippers are on the point of leaving, a great noise is heard in the recess, where* Dom Balthazar's *haggard face is seen behind the bars.*

Balthazar. [*In the barred recess.*]
I killed my father! I killed my father!
And here am I, shut in,
Like a wild beast within a cage,
To stifle the mad din
Of my fierce soul's remorse and rage!

Prior.
Unhappy man!

[Dom Mark *throws himself at the foot of the Crucifix, and remains there in supplication throughout the scene.*

BALTHAZAR. [*To the crowd.*]
I am the Friar Balthazar!
My crime is a tempestuous flame,
Which bites and burns my soul with righteous shame;
I am that Friar Balthazar,
Who, your confessions being said,
Fiercely on faults and vices fell,
And all the while with secret guile
Beneath his hair-shirt kept and fed
His own damnation, his own hell.

PRIOR.
This is a madman! Pay no heed!

BALTHAZAR.
My father, kind in word and deed,
Bore gently with each furious excess;
One night I killed him, as you kill a dog,
With drunken callousness.

PRIOR.
Pay him no heed! Pay no heed!
As God is living, pay no heed!

BALTHAZAR.
A guiltless man, to death condemned,
Upon the scaffold took my place;
He prayed to God, he cried for grace,
He kissed in vain the Cross of Christ;
I coldly saw him sacrificed,
And, without moving, watched him die.
A glance, a word, a single cry,
The flaming of the sword had stemmed,
But that one word, which found no breath,
Between my teeth was crunched to death.

PRIOR. [*Indicating* BALTHAZAR *to the* MONKS.]
Tear him down by force from the tribune!
[*The* MONKS *move towards the tribune.*

BALTHAZAR.
I am the Friar Balthazar!
Lord of Argonne and of Rispaire:
Oh! these are murderous hands of bloody hate,
More ravenous than any maw;
Behold them: see, what hands are there!
The sovereigns of the law
In their tribunal did not dare
To scent the blood indelible,
Which, obstinately washen, steeped my hand;
But you, to-day, all you who understand,
Go forth among the townsfolk, forth and tell,
Proclaim it well . . .

PRIOR.
Such repentance is a scandal.
[*Blows of a hatchet on woodwork are heard.*

BALTHAZAR.
My soul is as a thicket of black sin,
Where every sacrilegious thorn
Curves back on me and drives black talons in;
The holy mantle I have worn
Becomes a lie: it serves to hide
The leprous, fetid flesh inside;
Evil in me is like a lustful flame,
The lips of men no more should speak my name;
I bid the whole world curse me and deride;
I bid you all spit in my face;
Cut off these hands, which wrought such murderous spite;
Tear off this mantle's prostituted white;

Call out the mob, stir up the populace!
On me let their worst fury dash:
I give myself for fists to crash,
My brow for stones to gash;
I bid them crush and batter in
This body, burdened with implacable sin;
I bid them throw, when torturing fires shall flag,
To the four winds this human rag!

[*The* MONKS *succeed in breaking the door and seizing* BALTHAZAR. *Great uproar. At once the* PRIOR *addresses the crowd.*

PRIOR.
Go out, all of you!

[*The* MONKS *thrust the crowd to the door of the Chapel.*

Go out, all of you! Balthazar is reserved for the thunderbolts of God.

[*The nave empties slowly. The* MONKS *who had gone up to the tribune, bring* BALTHAZAR *down and fling him on his knees before the* PRIOR *in the middle of the church. The* PRIOR *approaches him.*

PRIOR.
Thou friar Balthazar,
Thou hast made mockery of Christ,
Who wills that man should silently repent;
Our holy rules, our cloister's high intent
By thee are violently sacrificed;
Out of thy brain all meekness fades away;
Thou art as deaf and blind as iron is,
Not seeing with that drunken soul to-day
Thou rollest downward into Hell's abyss.

BALTHAZAR.
My God! My God!

PRIOR.
The blood, that stained thy father's face,
Stains all our walls to-day with crimson flake,
Thy wild-beast cunning sought a hiding-place
Here, to pollute our cloister for thy sake!

BALTHAZAR.
My God! My God! My God!

PRIOR. Hear what I say!
I had intended thee, when once my soul
Stood before Christ above, on life's highway
To follow in my steps, to play my rôle
Through strife and prayer and grim emergency.
God has restored my sight. I have my lesson.
He has shattered like a wreck on a wild sea
Before mine eyes the white, proud galleon,
Loaded with bales of myrrh and incense pure,
Which thou appearedst; windy fury now
Has stripped of holy oil's investiture
Thy brow, no more a gilded priestly brow.
To me thou seemest damned more utterly
Than if thy body in fire were sepulchred;
Thy crime's ungovernable memory
Shall never cease to make its clamour heard;
No prayer shall ever to thy frantic call
Respond with flaming tongue;
And, being dead, for thy soul last of all
Shall holy Mass be sung;
Ay, and this crozier, . . . [*He raises it threateningly.*
Which thy dream did crave
To wield with virile mastery, There! there!
[*He strikes at him.*
Thy flesh shall feel how hard it is to bear,
Not as a sceptre, but a common stave.

BALTHAZAR.
Strike! Strike! Strike! my father!

PRIOR. [*Flinching, supported by the* MONKS.] Ungodly! Ungodly! Ungodly!
[*Without perceiving it, he lets the crozier fall from his hands.*

A MONK. [*Approaching.*]
Murderer of Christ!

ANOTHER MONK.
Thief of repentance!

ANOTHER MONK.
Ruffian!

ANOTHER MONK.
Parricide!

THEODULE.
Blasphemer!
[THEODULE *thrusts* BALTHAZAR *aside with his foot, causing him to fall back with his face to the ground.*

PRIOR. [*Bracing himself up for a last effort.*]
No: lift him up: thrust him beyond the gate,
Beyond the walls, immediately,
Towards shame and horror and the last abyss!
[*The* MONKS *lift* DOM BALTHAZAR *and drive him before them as far as the church door, which they shut behind him noisily.*
And now for evermore be separate

His lot from ours, and may his mad crime's weight
Fall with more crushing horror on his life
Than even the scaffold's knife.

[*A long silence. At last* THOMAS *having picked up the crozier, advances towards the* PRIOR. *At this moment all the* MONKS, *except* IDESBALD *and* DOM MARK, *form a group round* THOMAS.

THOMAS. [*Looks intently at the* PRIOR.]
My father!

PRIOR. [*After a silence.*]
Be it so!

[*Pointing to the door by which* BALTHAZAR *has gone out.*

Since he refused his right, since he denied
The power in himself personified;
Since now among you all I find at length
Not one of my stature, not one of my strength;

[*Pointing at* THOMAS.

Do you at least defend, with Heaven's accord,
These cloisters in the ruthless days to be!

[THOMAS *gives back the crozier to the* PRIOR (*all this seems to take place mechanically*).

MARK. [*Left alone in front of the crucifix.*]
Out of the depths of thy great mercy, Lord,
Show helpful charity
To Balthazar, the brother of my soul;
Thou only knowest the whole,
And what new lot in Heaven remains,
Won by his penitential pains;
Lord, aid him at this moment, when
His foes are furies, masked as men;

THE CLOISTER

The world, a cruel, mud-bespattering horde;
His brethren, a calumnious frown;
To soothe his crimson agony, O Lord,
Send angels down!

CURTAIN.

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